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LECTURE:

ON THE

INDEBTEDNESS OF MODERN LITERATURE

TO

THE BIBLE.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE CITIZENS OF MOBILE, IN THE LECTURE-ROOM OF
THE GOVERNMENT-STREET CHURCH, MOBILE,

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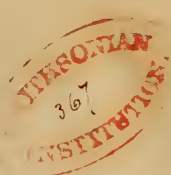
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PR 145
H3

LECTURE.

WHEREVER man is, there is character, intellectual and moral both; and the *doings* of the man develope that character. In the actions of his life, in the tenor of his confidential discourse, and in his epistolary correspondence, the *individual* traces an impress of himself.

But *communities*, as well as individuals, may be said to have and to exhibit a character of their own. The acts of the government, the enactments of the legislature, the proceedings of public bodies, the prevailing customs, and the tolerated vices, all furnish indication of public character: while in *the current literature* the manifestation of that character is more decisive still. National character is often as distinctly marked in national literature, as the character of the individual is marked in letters to his intimate friends. In German literature, in French, in English, in Italian, and in Spanish, there is a distinct character, intellectual and moral, appertaining to each one, and peculiar to itself. La Henriade never could have been written by an Englishman, nor Othello by a Frenchman, nor Goethe's Faust, nor the Orlando Furioso of Ariosto, by either of them.

In like manner, *each great age of the world*, and almost each successive generation of men, has exhibited its own peculiar literary character. The writings of king David or of Isaiah, the productions of Homer or of Herodotus, could not possibly be confounded with the literature of the Augustan age, nor could the productions of Chrysostom or of Augustine be mistaken for writings of the age

of Leo X., any more than writings such as those of Luther, of Melancthon, or of Erasmus, could be palmed on literary men as the product of the nineteenth century. Constitutional temperament, education, the company he keeps, the sentiments he hears, the books he reads, the scenes he witnesses, and the objects he pursues, all combine to influence the opinions, and modify the character of the *individual*. In like manner, the constitution of society, the prevailing forms of government, political changes, and antecedent revolutions, all combine to modify national character, and to determine the character of the age itself, and consequently to affect the character of its literature also.

Among the causes thus operating on the human mind, the views entertained of religion cannot be the least influential; and, consequently, the extensive dissemination of writings, such as those of which the Bible is made up, *must* have told, and told powerfully, upon the sentiments and the writings, at least, if not also upon the conduct of men. To some few among ancient writers, such as Plato and Seneca, the Scriptures were probably not wholly unknown. But it is in modern times only, that these sacred writings have been made extensively known: it is, therefore, in modern literature, chiefly, that we can look for the influence of revealed truth; and hence, I have proposed to treat of *The Indebtedness of Modern Literature to the Bible*.

First, then, *Wherever present, the Bible has fostered the spirit of sound learning*. From times of the remotest antiquity, it would appear that learning and religion have been closely connected together. Not to enlarge on the fact that even among the ancient heathen, their priesthood were usually their learned men, (just as though religion, even in its basest counterfeits, professing, as it does, to deal with the interests of the inner spirit of man, must necessarily cultivate the intellect, as a part of her own peculiar province,) it is obvious that the chief agents employed of heaven to receive and to promulgate revealed truth, were the friends and cultivators of learning. Moses, the Jewish lawgiver, "*was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*," and was, unquestionably, the most distinguished man of his age. The author of the book of Job was evidently a man of highly cultivated mind. The royal Solomon, and among the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, were all accomplished scholars: while, even so early as the time of Samuel, seminaries of learning, called "*schools of the prophets*," were maintained, from among the students in which were selected those on whom God sent the spirit of prophecy.

The first teachers of the Christian faith were trained for years near the person, and under the instructions of their divine Master, so as to be thoroughly versed in ethics and theology; and then

they were supernaturally endowed, at once, with a knowledge of the languages necessary for the successful prosecution of their mission—a knowledge which, otherwise, the tedious labour of years could alone have secured to them. Paul, from whose pen we have more than from that of any other of the New Testament writers, was a man, not only of unusual mental vigour, but also of varied reading, and of extensive, if not profound erudition. But, besides this learning found in some of the sacred writers, the very nature of the Bible is such as to call for attention to learning, at least in those who study in order to expound it. A divine revelation must be communicated in some particular language, or languages, which, to men of other nations, must be foreign and unintelligible without study. The original tongues of the Old and the New Testament have now, for many ages, been dead languages. A knowledge of these languages can, therefore, be acquired only by careful study.

In addition to all this, the Bible is, in some parts, of antiquity so remote, it embodies allusions to times, and places, and persons, so very ancient, and so entirely removed out of the range of ordinary research, that, in order to understand it fully, not only must various languages be studied, but a wide range of investigation must be made in history, chronology, geography, and sundry other branches of knowledge. Accordingly it has been found, in every age, that where the Bible was, there learning flourished. Among the most assiduous cultivators of learning, in their day, were the advocates of revealed truth in the first four centuries of the Christian era. During the long night of intellectual darkness, in what are called the middle ages, learning was confined, almost exclusively, to the cells of the monasteries. But in those cells the Bible was, and was studied, while on the great mass of men, from whom the Bible was withheld, the deep darkness of utter ignorance rested. So long as the church taught the traditions of men, keeping the Bible hid from public view, learning languished, and was found only among the clergy: but when the Reformation insisted on the exclusive authority of revelation in matters of faith and practice, and proclaimed the Bible as the book for the people, learning revived, the study of ancient languages was entered upon with ardour, other branches of learning received increased attention, numerous versions of the Bible in modern tongues were made, and published for the use of the people. Commentaries and expository works of various kinds were produced and published, and the art of criticism was once more called into operation, and greatly improved. So true it is, as the learned Blackstone remarks, when advocating the necessity for a liberal education at the university, as a preparation for the study of law, “The sciences are of a social disposition, and flourish best in the neighbourhood of each other: nor is there any branch of

learning but may be helped and improved, by assistance drawn from other arts." Blackstone's Commentaries, Book I. §1. Vol. I. p. 19. And we may add, there is no one branch of learning which can be thoroughly mastered, without attention to many other departments of knowledge: yea, a love for one learned pursuit will inevitably impel to the study of kindred and illustrative branches of knowledge. Thus it was actually found that, wherever the Bible was, there learning took up her abode, and multiplied her votaries, and achieved her triumphs. But learning is the foundation of literature. In fostering learning, then, the Bible has rendered essential service to the cause of literature. It has called it into existence, and mainly determined its character.

For, secondly, *Some of the profoundest works of modern literature have been called forth by the Bible.* Wherever the Bible is known, and duly prized, it awakens a spirit of learned research: ancient languages, the classics of Greece and Rome, as well as of Judea, become objects of diligent study; and learned lexicons, and laboriously compiled grammars, and critical editions of the ancient classics, (those of Greece, especially,) are put forth, as a means of elucidating the sacred text, or of fitting the student of revealed truth, rightly to investigate, properly to appreciate, and correctly to expound it. For the same purpose, also, the vast stores of ancient history must be unlocked, to furnish the world with such works as Prideaux's Connection of Sacred and Profane History, the Annals of Archbishop Usher, and the works of Lightfoote, of Horne, of Lardner, and Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible. An immense amount of learning has been employed in framing commentaries on the Bible, and expositions of its several books. Pole's Synopsis of Critical Expositions, Blayney's Jeremiah, Lowth's Isaiah, Newton on the Prophecies, Ainsworth on the Pentateuch, Michaelis on the Old and on the New Testament, Campbell's Notes on the Gospels, Rosenmüller's Scholia, and the Commentaries of Kuinoel, are all works of great learning, and they discover vast research.

Besides this, in reply to the objection of infidels, many able works have been written in defence of the Bible, from Watson's Apology, Leland's View of Deistical Writers, and Paley's Evidences, down to the Evidences as presented by Bishop McIlvaine of this country, and by Bishop Wilson of Calcutta. For vigorous thought, sound reasoning, lucid arrangement, and beautiful simplicity of style, many of the productions of this class stand unrivalled in our language. The works of Paley, especially, are models of composition, and of felicitous reasoning.

In other departments, the Bible has called forth the works of Bochart, of Reland, and Lowth on Hebrew Poetry, all distinguished

for profound erudition; while, in our own language, (to say nothing of Milton, of Young, and of Pollock,) such writers as Jeremy Taylor, Horne, Hooker, Barrow, Sherlock, Bishop Butler, and a host of others (constituting the very flower of our English literature) were induced to write solely from reverence for the Bible. In English literature, the Bible has proved the most liberal of all patrons.

But, thirdly, *The science of Jurisprudence is also largely indebted to the Bible.* This every sound lawyer will readily allow. In the books of Moses, written in the very remotest age of the world, and when mankind were everywhere little better than barbarians, we have presented in brief a body of laws which, to this day, is admitted by those most competent to judge, to be the very best code ever given to mankind; the model on which all subsequent legislators have proceeded in framing their statutes.

“As God, (says Blackstone,) when he created matter, and endued it with a principle of mobility, established certain rules for the direction of that motion, so, when he created man, and endued him with free will, to conduct himself in all parts of life, he laid down certain immutable laws of nature, whereby that free will is, in some degree, regulated and restrained, and gave him also the faculty of reason, to discover the purport of those laws. These are the eternal and immutable laws of good and evil, to which God himself always conforms, and which, as applicable to man, reason can discover; and which are so admirably ordered of God, as always to promote the substantial and permanent happiness of men; such, e. g. as that we should live honourably, hurt nobody, and render to every one his due. Indeed, to these three precepts Justinian has reduced the whole doctrine of law. This is THE LAW OF NATURE. But further, in compassion to the frailty, the imperfection, and the blindness of human reason, God hath been pleased, at sundry times and in divers manners, to discover and enforce his laws by an immediate and direct revelation. The doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine Law, and they are to be found only in the holy Scriptures. These precepts, when revealed, are found, upon comparison, to be really a part of the original law of nature, as they tend, in all their consequences, to man’s felicity: but, though agreeable to right reason, reason, unaided and alone, could not make them known. Upon these two foundations, the law of nature, and the law of revelation, depend all human laws: that is to say, no human laws should contradict these.”*

* I think myself happy in being able to introduce the following noble testimony to the value of the Bible, in legal science and civil government, from the pen of that able jurist and distinguished man, Chief Justice

Thus full and explicit is the great Commentator on Law, in regard to the supreme authority of the Bible in legal science: and in the writings of the ablest jurists everywhere are found, expressed or implied, similar concessions to the fundamental importance of the Bible in the science of jurisprudence. So close, indeed, is the connection between biblical and legal knowledge, that "during

Hornblower of New Jersey, found in his Charge to the Grand Jury of Essex County, N. J., Jan. 7, 1843. "We have in the Bible a wiser and a holier rule of action than the wisdom of man ever conceived, and in fewer words than all the learning of the schools ever compressed the wisest of their maxims: 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them!' This is emphatically the golden rule. It is universal in its application, and eternal in its principles. It lies at the foundation of our jurisprudence, legal and equitable, civil and criminal; and if acted on, this would do more to purify society, and elevate man to his true dignity as a rational and immortal being, than all the learning of the schools, and the vain philosophy of the world.

"It is a short and simple lesson that all may learn, from the lisping child of civilization to the grey-headed and untutored savage of the wilderness—a lesson which, if all would inculcate and practise, would smooth down the asperities of life, mitigate the sorrows incident to humanity, sweeten the springs of domestic enjoyment, strengthen and beautify the bonds of the social compact, dispense with the officers of justice, demolish our prisons, and pull down the last scaffold that should ever be erected for the execution of the convict.

"But instead of this, we are constantly told of the dignity and perfectibility of human nature, the noble qualities of the mind, and the elevating influence of education in the illimitable fields of art and science upon the happiness of man; and each lecturer, in his turn, has just discovered some new principle in nature, or above nature, which is to rectify all the ills of life, &c.

"When these giants in human intellect can tell me whence Moses derived his science in legislation, without admitting the supernatural and divine authority of the Ten Commandments, I shall begin to listen with more reverence to the teachers of human perfectibility. In that short and comprehensive code, we find given to us a perfect rule of action, covering the whole ground of man's existence: a rule, not only prescribing our duty to God and man, in our external behaviour, but reaching to the secret thoughts and feelings of our hearts in every possible condition of life, and in all our relations to our Maker and our fellow-beings. The wisdom of ages, the learning and philosophy of the schools, have never discovered a single defect in that code. Not a virtue which is not there inculcated. Not a vice, in its most doubtful and shadowy form, which is not there prohibited. Whence, then, I ask, did the great Jewish law-giver derive his spirit of legislation? If that code was written by the finger of the Almighty, let us bow to it with holy reverence, and seek no better rule of life, nor any wiser principles of action. But if they emanated only from the capacious mind, and were dictated by the wisdom of Moses—then Moses was a wiser, a more learned man, than any of our new teachers; and I had rather be under his jurisdiction and keep his commandments, than learn new rules of civil polity and social intercourse from the most learned and wise of the present day."

the middle ages, (as Selden remarks,) the clergy, as they then engrossed every other branch of learning, so they were particularly remarkable for their proficiency in the study of the law: it was then taught by them in the monasteries, in the universities, and in the families of the principal nobility." "Nullus clericus, nisi causidicus," (every priest is a lawyer,) is the character given of them soon after the conquest. The judges, therefore, were usually created out of the sacred order; as was the case also among the Normans: and all the inferior officers in courts of law were supplied by the lower clergy, which has caused their successors to be denominated CLERKS (clerici) to this day.

But again, fourthly, *The Bible has greatly contributed to promote the general diffusion of intelligence among the mass of the people.* Various considerations combine to assure us that such is the fact. The testimony of all competent and impartial observers declares, that among the mass of the people in those countries yet destitute of a knowledge of revelation, gross ignorance prevails. The little learning they do possess is confined to a very small class, the privileged few: the body of the population are, in point of intellect, but little elevated above the brutes around them. Yea, even in nations nominally Christian, the difference in the amount of intelligence among the common people, where the Bible is open to all, and among those where it is not in their hands, is almost incredibly great. Go among the poorer population of Catholic Ireland, of Italy, of Spain, or even of France, and you will find the grossest ignorance almost universally prevalent. They are taught to delegate the care of their future interests to their priests, and with the delegation, they seem to abandon almost the power of thought. In such communities you will find many minds naturally shrewd, vigorous, and active, but shrunk and paralyzed, for want of having their powers called into proper action. Relying on mere outward rites, truth, in all her majesty, her beauty, and her far-reaching influences, seems hid from their view, and lost even to their wishes. Now, with such a people, compare the same class of population as found in Scotland, or in New England, where the Bible is, emphatically, "*the people's book*;" where it is found in every house, in the rich man's library, and on the cottager's table, where it is read in every school-house, and where its sacred precepts are reverently listened to around the cheerful hearth of the day-labourer, and you will find a great difference in the amount of popular intelligence. This the Scottish poet, Burns, well understood; and accordingly he describes his cottage labourer closing the pleasant family intercourse on Saturday night:

"The cheerful supper done, wi' serious face,
 They round the ingle form a circle wide;
 The sire turns o'er, wi' patriarchal grace,
 The big ha' Bible, ance his father's pride:
 His bonnet reverently is laid aside,
 His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare:
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
 He wales a portion with judicious care;
 And, "*Let us worship God*," he says, with solemn air.

The priest-like father reads the sacred page,
 How *Abram* was the friend of God on high,
 Or *Moses* bade eternal warfare wage
 With Amalek's ungracious progeny:
 Or how the *royal bard* did groaning lie
 Beneath the stroke of Heaven's avenging ire:
 Or, Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry,
 Or rapt *Isaiah's* wild seraphic fire,
 Or other holy seers, that tun'd the sacred lyre.

Perhaps the *Christian volume* is the theme—
 How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed:
 How He who bore in heaven the second name,
 Had not on earth whereon to lay his head:
 How his first followers and servants sped—
 The precepts sage they wrote to many a land:
 How he, who lone in *Patmos* banished,
 Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand,

And heard great Babylon's doom pronounc'd by Heaven's command.

Then kneeling down, to Heaven's eternal King
 The saint, the father, and the husband prays.

* * * * *

From scenes like these, old Scotia's grandeur springs,
 That makes her loved at home, revered abroad."

Yes,—in such a country it is that you find a thinking, reasoning community, given to reflection, and comparatively free from superstition. Nor is the cause of this difference unintelligible or obscure. By the amazing truths which it presents, the Bible is directly calculated to awaken thought, intense thought; and it furnishes abundant materials to feed and to maintain thought. Destitute of revelation, man's thoughts are confined to this world, its pleasures, its cares, and its interests: and what can the mere notion of a local deity, like the heathen idols, or of a patron saint to look to for protection, do to elevate the thoughts and stimulate the intellect?

How meagre and unimportant were the notions of superior beings, entertained by the most polished of ancient pagan philosophers. But, open the page of inspiration before man's eye, and what a host of glorious truths and ennobling ideas is at once presented to his mind! The nature and attributes of the Eternal Spirit, his boundless power, his spotless holiness, his inflexible justice,

man's responsibility, and, above all, the stupendous discoveries of divine mercy in the plan of redemption, are truths blazing on every page of the Bible,—truths admirably adapted to arrest attention, to awaken thought, profound, intense, long continued thought, and by their influence, to touch the springs of human feeling, expand the very dimensions of the mind itself, and new model the entire character. These and similar truths (presented only in the Bible) cannot be uninfluential on the mind that perceives and contemplates them. Just so far as the Bible is known and studied in a community, are these truths known ; and so far must their influence be felt. But if an ennobling influence be thus diffused over the public mind, the effects of that influence cannot fail to show itself on the literature, which is at once the offspring and the guage of popular intellect.

But, fifthly, *The Bible has elevated the tone of morals in human society, and has awakened a gentler spirit in man's bosom.* That the standard of morals is greatly elevated by the Bible, no well-informed person can doubt. A comparison of heathen tribes, ancient or modern, with a Christian community in this respect, presents ample confirmation of this position. The picture of heathen morals drawn by the Apostle Paul in the first chapter of Romans, and in sundry other passages in his epistles, is found reflected in the pages of the most polished writers of classical antiquity, Greek and Roman both ; and the testimony of missionaries long resident among the heathen of our own day, and that of observant and impartial travellers, assures us that it is a faithful likeness to the present hour. The pages of ancient learning and elegance are often defaced by unutterable abominations, which appear to have been placed there with hardly a consciousness of impropriety on the part of the accomplished writers. There *may*, indeed, be similar abominations perpetrated in the bosom of society now, and possibly the amount of actual wickedness is not very greatly diminished in our day, for the human heart is always the same. But, if so, the evil is perpetrated secretly, and cautiously, not challenging notice in open day. It is, even by the perpetrators, felt to be an evil, a thing to be ashamed of, not protruded before others and openly gloried in. Works, which, in the polished age of Augustus, were everywhere well received, would not now be tolerated : no man would dare to publish them in any country in Christendom. Even in the corrupt capitals of Europe, however reckless the dissipation of actual life, literature must present at least the external aspect of decency. The unprincipled and the abandoned *may* now be as desperately wicked as were the most dissolute among the heathen of old, but there is now, through the influence of the Bible, an incomparably larger proportion of human society, than heathenism ever knew, that love and practice purity of life ; and the influence

of these serves to restrain the open exhibition of licentiousness, in every part of the community, and in every grade of society.

Moreover, the *peaceful spirit of revelation* has spread its influence far and wide, through every part of human society. Men no longer deem all foreign nations barbarians, lying almost beyond the pale of humanity. No longer is warfare conducted in the spirit of sanguinary ferocity that prevailed among ancient pagans, and still prevails among heathen tribes. Formerly captives taken in war were put to death in cold blood, without any sense of injustice, any feeling of shame. The mildest doom impending over the captive, was to pass his life in hopeless slavery under his conqueror, or those to whom that conqueror might sell him. "Even so late as the 16th century, (says Chancellor Kent,) in many instances, shipwrecked strangers were made prisoners, and sold as slaves, without exciting any complaint, or offending any public sense of shame. Numerous cases occurred of acts of the grossest perfidy and cruelty towards mere strangers, as well as towards enemies. Prisoners were put to death for their gallantry and brave defence in war. There was no reliance to be placed upon the word and honour of men in power." Kent's Com. Vol. I. p. 9. But a decided reformation of manners and improvement of feeling has been effected in modern times; "and," says Chancellor Kent again, (Vol. I. p. 10,) "the influence of Christianity (i. e. the Bible) has been very efficient towards the introduction of a better and more enlightened sense of right and justice among the several governments of Europe. It taught the duty of benevolence to strangers, of humanity to the vanquished, of the obligation of good faith,—of the sin of murder, revenge, and rapacity. The history of Europe, during the earlier periods of modern history, abounds with interesting and strong cases, to show the authority of revelation over turbulent princes and fierce warriors, and the effect of that authority in meliorating manners, checking violence, and introducing a system of morals which inculcated peace, moderation, and justice." Just so far as the doctrines of the Bible are received which teach that *men are all of one race*, members of one family, children of the same Heavenly Father, may the spirit of humanity be expected to prevail; and when, moreover, the soul's immortality is fully admitted, it throws a sacredness over the estimate of human life, and presents war and bloodshed and violence in a most repulsive light. Accordingly, a more humane and liberal spirit characterizes the intercourse of nations one with another: a resort to war (except in cases of absolute necessity) is everywhere condemned by public opinion, and *modern literature shows the influence of this change*; it is more liberal, it breathes less of a sanguinary spirit, and exhibits far more refinement, gentleness, and deli-

cacy of feeling. More especially is this change apparent in the different manner in which woman is everywhere treated in Christian society, and the different light in which she is depicted and spoken of in literary works. On this point much might be said, but this brief allusion must here suffice. As woman sways a gentle but all-commanding influence at the domestic hearth, and in the community around her; as her spirit is preëminently the presiding genius of home, with all its calm joys; so, in the literature of modern times, the altered position of woman seems to show itself, in a pure and hallowed influence shed over the whole range of literary production. Her gentle spirit is there, as in the home of the mind. But it is the Bible that has elevated woman, cultivated her mind, polished her manners, and chastened her spirit; and through her it has sent this gentle influence on human intercourse and on modern literature.

But again, sixthly, *The Bible has furnished to modern literature topics of peculiar grandeur, and thoughts of rare beauty, utterly unknown where revelation is not.* How poor and unsatisfactory were the conceptions of the most distinguished writers of classical antiquity concerning the nature and the destiny of man, and especially concerning a superior power. How human in their passions, and degraded in character, are *all* of the numerous gods and demi-gods with which Homer peoples his Olympus! How even the wisest of the ancient philosophers encumber their description of a supreme deity by the notion of the stern decrees of irresistible fate, to which the highest of their deities is subject! Among many things that are beautiful, and some that are truly sublime, this poverty of thought respecting the Great First Cause exerts a belittling influence that is continually felt. In the writings of the wisest of the ancients, *man* is often represented as equal in dignity of character to their gods, if not positively superior.

But now, what a commanding influence over the whole range of human thought and conception, flows from the sublime idea presented in revelation, of One God, the cause of all things, himself uncaused, eternal, unchangeable, supremely independent, perfect in his nature, and infinite in all his attributes! The presentation of that one glorious conception to the mind, is like the rising of the sun to the bodily vision; the darkness and uncertainty previously resting on every object are dissipated, and a *world* bursts forth to view, in all its beauty of forms, its symmetry of proportions, and its multiplicity of mutual relations, each object appearing in its true nature, its proper position, its due connections! Who can estimate the far-reaching influence on human thought of this one discovery of a spiritual Being, the Creator of all, who said, "*Let there be light!*" and there was light; who "*spake, and it was done; who commanded, and it stood fast?*" What a subject for reflection—an Almighty

God, omnipresent and omniscient! How can it do other than influence and new model the whole current of human thought, and the very modes of expressing thought? Now, this grand idea is derived from the Bible, and no one yet has estimated the amount of sublime thought and ennobling sentiment it has shed over our modern literature, even those portions of it that have proceeded from men who scoff at that very Bible to which they are indebted for nearly every thought that gives force and beauty to their productions: as, e. g., that conception of Byron's, presenting, in the presence of Manfred, the Spirit of Evil to the gaze of the startled Abbot, who exclaims, with pious horror,

"Ah! he unveils his aspect: on his brow
The thunder scars are graven: from his eye
Glares forth the immortality of hell!"

The doom of Cain was obviously in the writer's mind. And what but a reflected image of grand ideas presented in the Bible, is that beautiful passage near the close of *Childe Harold*, the address to the ocean!

"Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee, in vain:
Man marks the earth with ruin, his control
Stops with the shore: upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown."

Time writes no wrinkles on thine azure brow;
Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now,
Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
Glasses itself in tempests: in all time
Calm or convuls'd, in breeze or gale or storm,
Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime
Dark heaving: boundless, endless, and sublime.
The image of eternity—the throne
Of the invisible;—even from out thy slime
The monsters of the deep are made; each zone
Obeys thee;—thou goest forth dread, fathomless, alone"

Compared with such images, the finest figures of ancient classic eloquence are tame and common-place. But every one of these splendid images is furnished in the Bible! Thus, the creation of the monsters of the deep *out of the slime of ocean*, is an idea suggested by that passage in Genesis 2: 20, 21. *And God created great whales (sea-monsters) and every living creature that moveth, which the WATERS brought forth abundantly, after their kind.* The impotence of man on the ocean, is suggested by contrast from the

scriptural declaration of God's exclusive power to say to the boisterous element, "hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." Job 38: 11. While the idea of the ocean's being God's throne, and the *Almighty's form glassing itself in tempests upon ocean, as in a mirror*, is only a beautiful presentation of the thought so often found in Holy Writ, that *God, as king, sitteth upon the floods; he maketh darkness his pavilion round about him; thick clouds and tempests are under his feet;—yea, he rideth upon the wings of the wind!*—That fine passage in Manfred, in which the sage defies the fiend, and declares himself the architect of his own destiny:

———"Back to thy hell.

Thou hast no power upon me, *that* I feel;
 Thou never shalt possess me, *that* I know.
 What I have done, is done. I have within
 A torture which could nothing gain from thine:
 The mind which is immortal, makes itself
 Requital for its good or evil thoughts,
 Is its own origin of ill, and end,
 And its own place and time; its innate sense,
 When stripp'd of this mortality, derives
 No colour from the fleeting things without;
 But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,
 Born from the knowledge of its own desert.
 Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;
 I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey,
 But was my own destroyer, and will be
 My own hereafter.—Back, ye baffled fiends!
 The hand of death is on me,—but not yours."

This very spirited passage is but a poetic amplification of the Bible doctrine, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

The several passages in different writers in which remorse is so vividly described,—such as that of Pollock, Book III., p. 83:

"There is a fire, that on the verge of God's commandments
 Burns, and on the vitals feeds of all who pass—
 Who pass—there meet remorse!"

and that splendid passage in Byron's *Giaour*:

"The mind that broods o'er guilty woes,
 Is like the scorpion, girt by fire,
 In circle narrowing as it glows;
 The flames around their captive close,
 Till, only search'd by thousand throes,
 And maddening in her ire,
 One sad and sole relief she knows,
 The sting she nourish'd for her foes,
 Whose venom never yet was vain,
 Gives but one pang, and cures all pain,
 And darts into her desperate brain.

So do the dark in soul expire,
 Or live, like scorpion girt by fire :
 So writhes the mind remorse hath riven,—
 Unfit for earth, undoom'd for heaven ;
 Darkness above, despair beneath.
 Around it flame, within it death !”

are plainly based upon the Bible representations of the restlessness of the wicked, to whom there is no peace ; and especially upon that terrific image of unending remorse hereafter, *where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*. So that graphic couplet from Shakspeare’s Henry VI. :

“ Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind ;
 The thief doth fear each bush an officer.”

and again—

“ What stronger breast-plate than a heart untainted.
 Thrice is he arm’d that hath his quarrel just ;
 And he, but naked,—tho’ lock’d up in steel,
 Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.”

(Henry VI. Part II.)

exhibit, only more amplified, the thought of Solomon, “ The wicked flee when no man pursueth ;—but the righteous are bold as a lion !” Prov. 28 : 1.—The same thought, doubtless, gave birth to those striking lines in Scott’s Marmion :

“ Thus oft it haps, that when within
 They shrink at sense of secret sin,
 A feather daunts the brave :
 A fool’s wild speech confounds the wise,
 And proudest princes veil their eyes
 Before their meanest slave.”

There is a curious and very beautiful idea presented in Campbell’s Gertrude of Wyoming, viz., that the very dagger which slays the cruel foe, is sharpened by contact with the heart it smites :

“ Old Outalissi woke his battle song—

* * * * *

To whet a dagger on their stony hearts,
 And smile avenged, ere yet his eagle spirit parts.”

A similar thought is involved in the bitter taunt that Gratiano throws out against Shylock, as he is whetting his knife on the sole of his shoe, in the trial of Antonio, on his bond, before the Duke, in the Merchant of Venice :

“ Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew,
 Thou mak’st thy knife keen !”

Now, in both these passages, the *thought* is but a reflected image of the figure so often employed in the Bible, of “ *a heart of stone*,” to denote extreme obduracy in evil.

It is from the Bible alone that we derive any certain knowledge of a future state ; the idea of a heaven of purity and joy for the righteous, of a hell of sorrow for the wicked. How puerile were the conceptions of the ancient philosophers as to the condition of the good in Elysium, (a land of discontented shadows, pining ever after earth and its pleasures,) and of the fantastic griefs of the bad in Tartarus,—when compared with the recorded decision of the Bible, “*whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,*” in heaven, or in hell forever ! How many pleasing associations, also, are connected with our knowledge of angelic beings, spirits yet nobler than men ! But the existence of angels is made known to us only in the Bible !

Withdraw the Bible, then, from among men, destroy the knowledge of all that is taught in the Bible, and what words can express the change which would at once take place in our literature ? The origin of man, the fall, the deluge, the early history of our race, the primal settlement of nations,—the history of the patriarchs, the origin and early history of that singular race, the Jews, are all, all, effectually swept out of memory : with them, the splendid creations of Milton’s genius sink into annihilation ; Bunyan’s Pilgrim and his Holy War are lost to us ; the manly reasoning of Paley, the profound argument of Butler, the eloquence of Barrow and Sherlock, of Tillotson and Taylor, of Howe and Flavel, of Robert Hall, of Dwight and Chalmers, are all lost to us. The learned labours of Prideaux and Leland, and Stillingfleet and Watson, of Leslie and West, of Michaelis, of Bengel and Kennicott, of Beza, of Calvin, of Luther, and of a host innumerable, are all buried in eternal oblivion ;—while the sweetest strains of Klopstock, of Tasso, of Dante, of our own Thomson and Pope, of Cowper and Montgomery, of Campbell and of Scott, die away in eternal silence. The reasonings of Locke, of Stewart, of Reide, and even of Brown, must be entirely new-modelled ; and scarcely will the department of natural science remain unscathed, so wide-spread, so almost universal would be the sweep of destruction among the noblest works of our literature, that must follow in the train of the Bible’s extinction.

Moreover, from the mere remnant of literature that would escape utter oblivion, the richest ornaments, the most striking thoughts, the most impressive figures would be erased :—for the choicest of all these are borrowed from the Bible. When you meet with a peculiarly grand thought, or forcible figure, in the works of such writers as Dryden, Pope, Byron—aye, Shakspeare himself, the master deeply learned in the human heart—you will find, almost certainly, that it is drawn from the Bible ; it is the echo of some thought there found. Thus that beautiful closing line in the funeral song, on the burial of

Sir John Moore, "*We left him alone with his glory!*" is obviously but a reflex image of the sublime picture furnished by Isaiah, when describing Sheol, the place where the dead are congregated: "All the kings of the earth, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house!" Isa. 14: 18.

In like manner, Byron's *Giaour* has a fine passage, in which, after Hassan has been slain by a sudden onslaught of his foe, the *Giaour*, the mother of Hassan is represented as awaiting his return, and wondering at his delay; thus—

"The browsing camel bells are tinkling,
 His mother look'd from her lattice high,
 She saw the dews of eve besprinkling
 The pasture green beneath her eye,
 She saw the planets faintly twinkling:
 'Tis twilight,—sure his train is nigh.
 She could not rest in his garden bower,
 But gaz'd thro' the grate of his steepest tower:
 Why comes he not? his steeds are fleet,
 Nor shrink they from the summer heat;
 Why sends not the bridegroom his promis'd gift?"

This spirited description is but a modern application of a yet finer passage in the triumphant song of Deborah, the Jewish prophetess and judge (Judges 5: 28–30): "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?' Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? Have they not divided the prey? to every man a damsel or two: to Sisera a prey of divers colours, of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoils?"

That touching passage in *Childe Harold*, in which the untimely death of the Princess Charlotte of England, and of her new-born son, is lamented, is but a sweet echo of one of the most beautiful passages found in the Hebrew prophets:

"Hark! forth from the abyss a voice proceeds,
 A long low distant murmur of dread sound,
 Such as arises when a nation bleeds
 With some deep and immedicable wound;
 Through storm and darkness yawns the pending ground,
 The gulf is thick with phantoms;—but the chief
 Seems royal still, though with her head discrown'd
 And pale—but lovely, * * * *
 Scion of chiefs and monarchs! where art thou?
 Fond hope of many nations—art thou dead?
 Could not the grave forget thee, and lay low
 Some less majestic, less beloved head?"

This is truly beautiful, but its whole beauty is borrowed;—'tis

only a skilful application of that passage in Isaiah which represents the shades of the monarchs of earth gathered in Acheron, and awaiting the coming of the shade of the mighty king of Babylon : " The abyss from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming : it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth : it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak, and shall say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we ? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols : the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning ! how art *thou* cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations !" Isaiah 14 : 9-12.

So also that affecting picture which the noble poet presents to the widowed husband of the lamented princess :

" Of sackcloth was thy wedding garment made,
 Thy bridal fruit is ashes : in the dust
 The fair-hair'd daughter of the isles is laid ;—
 The love of millions, * * * *

(Childe Harold, Canto IV., clxx.)

is but a judicious application of the figures which are furnished in the Hebrew prophet's delineation of the afflicted daughter of Judah, Lam. 2 : 10 : " The elders of the daughter of Judah sit upon the ground, and keep silence : they have cast up dust upon their heads, they have girded themselves with sackcloth : the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground." And also Jeremiah 6 : 26 : " Oh, daughter of Judah, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes : make thee mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation."

Nor is it a far-fetched, nor an improbable idea, that would attribute the poetic beauty which invests the introduction, by Shakespeare, of the ghost of Banquo, and of that of Hamlet's father, to the ideas awakened in the poet's mind by the Old Testament record of the raising up of the spirit of the prophet Samuel, by the witch of Endor ; and also the whole of the great dramatic bard's supernatural machinery of the witches in Macbeth, the fairies in the Midsummer Night's Dream, and the obedient spirits of Prospero in the Tempest, to the obscure intimations given in the sacred record, of men's having attempted, in times of old, to have dealings with familiar spirits. I here hazard no conjecture as to the true interpretation of such passages in holy writ. I am alluding merely to the influence which the popular understanding of them has had on prevalent superstitions, and on our literature, into which these superstitions have been wrought with so much skill, and so fine an effect. Nor can we doubt that the idea of Mephistopheles in his Faust, and of his dance and song of the witches, was so suggested to

Goethe ;—and of his Manfred to Byron. In this last mentioned poem, also, the appearance of the shadowy outline of the fiend before Manfred, slowly only, and with horror, discerned by the pious Abbot, thus—

Manf. Look there !—what dost thou see ?

Ab. Nothing !

Manf. Look there, I say,

And stedfastly :—now tell me what thou seest !

Ab. That which should shake me,—but I fear it not.

I see a dark and awful figure rise,

Like an infernal god, from out the earth ;

His face wrapt in a mantle, and his form

Rob'd as with angry clouds,”

strongly brings to mind that sublime passage in the book of Job (Job 4 : 14–16) : “ In thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face ; the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still,—but I could not discern the form thereof : an image was before mine eyes ;—there was silence, and I heard a voice.” The dream of Clarence, in Shakespeare’s Richard III., is cast in the same mould. These are but specimens, hastily selected, in illustration of my position, that many of the finest sentiments, and the most beautiful images that adorn our modern literature, are only the echoes of thoughts expressed in the Bible.

And nowhere is this rich echo of Bible thoughts more distinctly perceptible than in that inimitable address of Portia, when personating the learned Dr. Balthazar, to the relentless Shylock, in order to move him to abate the rigor of his demand against Antonio, in the Merchant of Venice :

“ The quality of mercy is not strain’d ;
It droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the earth beneath. It is twice bless’d :
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes :
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest : it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute of awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.
But mercy is above this sceptred sway ;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute of God himself ;
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew !
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation : we do pray for mercy ;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.”

So clearly does this fine passage re-echo Bible thoughts throughout, that it is difficult, as we hear it, not to feel as though listening to sentences selected directly from the Bible itself. And truly the language used in the Bible comes very near it: e. g., "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment," Jas. 2: 13. "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger, and it is his glory to pass by a transgression," Prov. 19: 11. "Mercy and truth preserve a king; and his throne is upholden by mercy," Prov. 20: 28. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." "Verily I say unto you, if ye forgive not every man his brother their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you."

Again,—that much admired passage in the Tempest:

"The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind: We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep,"

is nothing more than a fine amplification of two short passages from the Bible: "The fashion of this world passeth away." And again, "What is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away!" From the same source, doubtless, sprung that fine passage in Prior's Solomon:

"A flower that does with opening dawn arise,
And, flourishing the day, at evening dies;
A winged eastern blast, just skimming o'er
The ocean's brow, and sinking on the shore;
A fire, whose flames thro' crackling stubble fly;
A meteor, shooting from the summer sky;
A bowl, adown the bending mountain roll'd;
A bubble breaking,—and a fable told:
A noontide shadow, and a midnight dream;
Are emblems, which, with semblance apt, proclaim
Our earthly course."

So also that of Fawkes:

"If life a thousand years, or e'er so few,
'Tis repetition all, and nothing new:
A fair, where thousands meet, but none can stay;
An inn, where travellers meet, and post away."

And how majestically does Shakspeare make the fallen Woolsey echo the sentiment of the Hebrew prophet, "All flesh is grass, and the glory thereof as the flower of grass," &c.

"Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness!
This is the state of man: To-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope: to-morrow, blossoms,

And bears his blushing honors thick upon him:
 The third day comes a frost,—a killing frost;
 And, when he thinks, (good easy man,) full surely
 His greatness is a ripening,—nips his root,
 And then he falls as I do."

Just so says the prophet, "The wind passeth over it, and it is gone."

The Bible is replete with passages of the highest sublimity—passages, many of which breathe, also, a most touching eloquence. Such are, the song of Deborah and Barak, in Judges: the reception given by the shades of Hades to the spirit of Babylon's king, as presented in Isa. chap. 14, already referred to. Such, also, is the triumphant song of the Israelites, on viewing the destruction of Egypt's martial hosts in the Red Sea (Exodus, chap. 15). Such is the prayer of Jonah (Jonah, chap. 2); and where shall we find, in any writings, a passage fuller of grand imagery than the prayer of the prophet Habakkuk, chap. 3: 3-16? Where are sublimity and beauty more richly combined than in the 104th Psalm? "O Lord my God, thou art very great," &c. &c. Where can you find a more touching description of goodness worthy of the Deity, than in Psalm 103? "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him," &c. &c. How beautiful and how appropriate, too, is the picture drawn by Moses (Deut. 32: 9, 14) of the care of Jehovah for his own covenant people! "The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock." But I forbear; the Bible is full of such imagery, grand, striking, and affecting. Do you look for pathos? What more pathetic than David's lament over Jonathan and Saul, slain in battle (2 Sam. 1: 17-27)? What more affecting than the royal father's heart-piercing lamentation over his fair-haired, but rebellious son? "O my son, Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Would you ponder deeply the treasured results of wisdom, the dearbought fruits of experience? You have, in the book of Proverbs, an exhaustless storehouse of wisdom, for the guidance of your conduct in all the diversified circumstances of human life. The one short book of Proverbs contains more sound practical wisdom, than

can be gathered from all the boasted teachings of all the renowned philosophers of antiquity and of modern times combined.

Now the Bible, thus teeming with wisdom, and blazing with beauty of thought and splendor of imagery, has, for ages, been in the hands of men; and these thrilling passages have been before their eyes and present to their minds; and they have mingled in the thoughts and assisted to mould the conceptions and to determine the phraseology of our most masterly writers.

Let the Bible and its influences, direct and indirect, be blotted out of existence, and you at once extinguish the sun that illumines our literary heavens, and you impair the strength and mar the beauty of our whole literature.

That book which, whenever possessed, has fostered the spirit of learning in all its varied departments; which has given birth to some of the profoundest works in existence, written solely for its illustration; which has laid a broad foundation for the science of jurisprudence; has promoted (far as it has been known) general intelligence among the mass of the people; which has decidedly elevated the tone of morals, has imbued mankind with a gentler spirit, and has mitigated the horrors of war; that book which (besides doing all this) has furnished to our most admired writers, topics of unrivalled grandeur, and images of peculiar beauty, so that its annihilation would deface the largest and the fairest portion of our literature; that book may well awaken our admiration, ensure our respect, and commend itself to our closest attention, as the sun of true knowledge, the light and glory of our literature, a prize invaluable to human society, a boon of priceless worth to every young man.

And that book is the Bible, Heaven's best gift to man. It is the repository of noble thoughts, the originator of splendid imagery, the oracle of soundest wisdom. It is a counsellor to the young,—a solace to the aged. *It is the grand text book to the true student!* It sparkles with brilliance, it blazes with beauty, and it breathes the spirit of liberty. It is emphatically and pre-eminently, **THE BOOK FOR THE PEOPLE!**

Most wondrous book! bright candle of the Lord!
 Star of eternity! the only star
 By which the bark of man could navigate
 The sea of life, and gain the coast of bliss
 Securely;—only star which rose on Time,
 And, on its dark and troubled billows, still,
 As generation drifting swiftly by,
 Succeeded generation,—threw a ray
 Of heaven's own light,—and to the hills of God,
 The everlasting hills,—pointed the sinner's eye.
 This book,—this glorious book, on every line
 Mark'd with the seal of high divinity;
 On every leaf bedew'd with drops of love



Divine,—and with the eternal heraldry
And signature of God Almighty stamp'd
From first to last,—this ray of sacred light,
This lamp, from off the everlasting throne,
Mercy took down, and, in the night of time
Stood, casting on the dark her gracious bow;
And evermore beseeching men with tears
And earnest sighs, to read, believe, and live!"

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